

Brown-Donahue House
(C. A. Brown House; Helen Donahue House)
Delano Park
Cape Elizabeth
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-119

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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BROWN-DONAHUE HOUSE

HABS No. ME-119

(C. A. BROWN HOUSE; HELEN DONAHUE HOUSE)

Location: Delano Park, Cape Elizabeth, Cumberland County, Maine.

Present Owner and Occupant: Mrs. Helen Donahue

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement of Significance: This structure was designed in 1885-86 by John Calvin Stevens, architect of Portland. It is the best local example of the typical shingled suburban and summer houses occurring throughout the 1880's, particularly in coastal New England.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Original and subsequent owners: C. A. Brown. A Mr. Reeves bought it from Mr. Brown. Mrs. Donahue bought it from Mr. Reeves c. 1922. (Mrs. Donahue is very old and feeble. Mr. Stevens is not sure of Mr. Reeves' name or date of purchases.)
2. Date of erection: 1885-6.
3. Architect: The most typical and successful of John Calvin Stevens' 'shingle style' houses, with the exception of the James Hopkins Smith house at Falmouth Foreside (now the Charles Shipman Payson house) which, however, has been very extensively remodelled -- even though by Stevens himself, but in a later style. Perhaps the firm of Stevens and (Albert Winslow) Cobb built the most successful dwellings in what Vincent Scully christened the 'shingle style' (The Shingle Style, Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1955.) To quote Scully: "In the movement towards geometric and spatial discipline in design, the work of John Calvin Stevens of Portland, Maine is of critical importance." Stevens and Cobb not only sum up in their theory (propounded in their Examples of American Domestic Architecture, New York, 1889) many of the "basic premises of the shingled cottage style" (Scully) and prefigure Sullivan and Wright in their predilections for an ethical & organic

architecture, but "they also indicate what may be called a classic stage in its development, namely a desire for unity, order and discipline which would formalize and, as it were, objectify the picturesque." (Scully) Scully goes on to say of this house: "'Strength of mass and simplicity of form'" [a quotation from George Sheldon's Artistic Country Seats, New York, 1886-87, an "extremely valuable book" whereby the author describes the J. H. Smith house] are also characteristic of Stevens' C. A. Brown house, Delano Park, near Portland, 1885-86. Powerful gables slope down over the deep void of the porch. Stevens here carefully puts together stone, varied shingles, and precise, white-painted sill and window details. There is a strong structural sense and a decisive visual impact. The house begins to take on that archetypal intensity toward which one feels the deepest yearnings of its period -- however confused by semantic complexity -- to have been directed." (pp. 119-120 Scully)

After looking at dozens of plans, drawings and photographs in the architectural office of Stevens' grandson, John Calvin Stevens, in Portland, and examining several in the Portland area, the preparer of this form is reasonably sure that this house is the best and most representative of Stevens' work. It is also beautifully situated and in nearly 'mint' condition -- even the original hand-painted gilt decoration on the plaster of the living room remains -- though the walls and woodwork elsewhere throughout have been repainted.

On the whole certainly one of the most successful, beautiful and typical of a kind of summer and suburban shingle house with open plan and veranda, which occurs throughout the United States in the 1880's and is nearly ubiquitous in summer houses on the Atlantic coast and northwestern lakes and rivers -- especially in New England. The house is also by one of the best architects of the style, and especially typical of the New England coast from Kittery to Bar Harbor and Winter Harbor, and in a few instances beyond.

4. Alterations and additions: Porch enclosed with glass.

5. Important old views: Published as drawings in Stevens and Cobb, Examples of American Domestic Architecture, New York, 1889, plates 21 and 22.

2 photographs (exterior) and detail in The Shingle Style, etc., Vincent Scully, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1955, illustrations 89 and 90.
6. Sources of information: John Calvin Stevens, architect, Portland, Maine. Vincent Scully, The Shingle Style, etc., and Mrs. Helen Donahue, Delano Park, Cape Elizabeth, Maine.

Prepared by: Samuel M. Green
Midcoast Maine II
June 1962

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. This structure is an outstanding example of the typical late 19th century shingled beach house for summer residents of the coast of Maine. Fireplaces, stairway, and dining room bay window are of particular interest. This structure is beautifully integrated with the rock ledge on which it is situated.
2. Condition of the fabric: Excellent, with minor modifications which do not affect the original concept.

B. Technical Description of the Exterior:

1. This structure is a large two-story, wood frame, wood shingled house, with a foundation and basement wall and retaining walls of field stone, slate shingled intersecting gable roof, with a terrace toward ocean. The building is 29'-6" x 76'-0 $\frac{1}{2}$ " and faces the Atlantic Ocean.
2. Foundations: Exterior foundation walls which project upwards for basement walls and outwards into retaining walls are of semi-dressed ledge or field stone. The building appears to be set on bed rock.
3. Wall construction: Wood frame covered with grey wood shingles in a staggered pattern, on wood sheathing and building paper, blown insulation in ocean side walls (modern).

4. Porches, stoops, terraces, balconies:
 - a. Porches:
 - i. Piazza at south elevation first floor partly enclosed c. 1920.
 - ii. Sleeping porches second floor north and south elevations enclosed c. 1920.
 - b. Stoops and steps: Wood and stone steps at front entrance separated by concrete (pebble aggregate) landing. Room attached to basement extends to form roof deck @ north (rear) door. Wood steps to grade.
 - c. Terrace, east side, originally wood plank, replaced with slate paving c. 1925, which was replaced with concrete (green) 1962.
 - d. Balcony: East elevation second floor. Wood frame, sheet metal floor. Wood balustrade.
5. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys extend above ridge of roof, one has metal cap.
6. Openings:
 - i. Doorways & Doors
 - a. Front doorway: five panel door, mortise and tenon, top panel glazed with four transparent lights with blue stained glass surrounds in various textures. Brass door hardware and knocker. Screen door at front entrance.
 - b. French doors in living room:
 1. To enclosed porch, four 10-light folding doors in opening.
 2. To terrace, wood frame, plate glass doors.
 - c. Rear door, four panels wood, mortise and tenon joints.
 - ii. Windows: Wide variety of double hung windows 20/2, 16/2, 12/1, 3/3; 28/2 at stair; casement 20 lights. Bay window has one casement, fixed windows, one large light with 28 surrounds. House originally had louvered shutters painted green. Flat stone arch at basement window, of field stone.

7. Roof:

- a. Long gable with intersecting gables and gambrel over "shed." Slate shingles. Flat roof over garage which is extended from basement, roofing felt and built-up roofing with gravel covering, copper flashing. Metal gutters and down spouts.
- b. Cornice and eaves: No overhang @ gable ends. Side of gable boxed but no cornice, south gable pediment overhangs wall.
- c. Dormers: Gable dormers in gambrel roof of "shed." Slate shingles on roof and walls, wood shingles on pediment.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan. Rectangular plan with "shed" or appendage a local tradition of house with shed attached for summer kitchen, wood shed, etc.

- a. Basement: Boiler room, storage, incinerator, and garage for two automobiles.
- b. First floor: Porch, entry vestibule to living room, dining room, pantry, kitchen, bedroom and bath; laundry room and bath in "shed". Stairs to basement and to maid's room on second floor.
- c. Second floor: 6 bedrooms and 2½ baths, central hall.

2. Stairways: "U" shaped stair, 5 risers in first run, 9 risers in second run; four balusters/tread, square newels.

Back stair from laundry. "L" shaped with three winders, to maid's room at second floor. Basement stair "L" shaped with one winder.

3. Flooring: Pine boards, some modern hardwood strips, linoleum covering modern glazed tile in some baths, concrete in basement, one water closet mounted on marble slab.

4. Walls: Plaster (hair binder) on wood lath; laminated paper boarding covers wall or ceiling in instances where plaster is flaking, joints covered with wood strips; living room wall plaster painted with brown swirl pattern, decorative wood framing of rough sawed members. Amounts of vertical beaded edge wood board wainscot.
5. Ceilings: Plaster or laminated paper boards. Ceiling in stair hall given panel effect by wood molding applied to board.
6. Doorways and doors: Four panel wood doors some glazed doors (7 lights). Several single panel doors, mirror on one side.
7. Trim: None of interest.
8. Hardware: Modern: Enameled metal, glass, and brass door knobs, brass plates. Original screen door knob and lock.
9. Lighting: Modern electric. Few simple hanging fixtures, mostly by bracket, table and floor lamps. Iron chandelier in dining room.
10. Heating: Original warm air heating system replaced with steam heat c. 1920. Operating fireplaces in living room and dining room. Fireplace in one bedroom, chimney thimble for stove pipe in one bedroom.
Living room fireplace brick, iron strap lintel, flat arch in soldier course, wood mantle. Iron crane, cast and wrought iron andirons, iron and wire screen, brick hearth. Brick hearth of second floor fireplace exposed at ceiling.
Dining room fireplace has terracotta tile around opening in floral pattern, head of child @ each corner. Wood mantle and trim.

D. Site:

1. The house is situated on a stone ledge on the Atlantic coast between Portland Headlight and Two Lights on Cape Elizabeth, at the end of a street (un-named) in Delano Park. The entrance is on the southwest corner. The site borders on Fort Williams.

2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: Coach house and barn, wood frame, gable and gambrel roof. Wood shingle walls, composition shingle roof. Wood frame garage, gambrel roof, wood shingle walls. Also designed by John C. Stevens and contemporary with house.
4. Walls and drives: Gravel.
5. Landscaping: Careful use of stone outcrops, natural vegetation, retaining walls of field stone.

Prepared by: F. Blair Reeves
Midcoast Maine II
July 1962